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Adam Newcombe

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The People, the Parks, the Loss

Adam Newcombe

Abstract *Terra nullius* is a Latin expression deriving from Roman law meaning 'land belonging to no one' or no man's land. The concept was used in international law to describe territory which has never been subject to the sovereignty of any state, or over which any prior sovereign has expressly or implicitly relinquished sovereignty. Implying an empty land, a land with no people, land as property with no owner, *terra nullius* is possibly the greatest legal travesty and fabrication ever enacted on an invaded people. This paper will attempt to make a little sense of what and why this has happened and the fundamental misunderstandings that underpins the state of modern Australia and the impact this continuing misunderstanding is having on indigenous and non-indigenous relationships in this country. The recent violent reaction at the Aboriginal tent embassy in Canberra is symptomatic of the convoluted misunderstandings triggered by the arrival of European settlers in 1788. That was a cry of rage no matter what anybody thinks about the method. But a rage of loss; with greater understanding comes hope and bridges and repair.

This paper addresses the re-imagining of pre-settlement Australia as a vast network of cultivated estates and parks rather than a near empty wilderness, an idea developed and presented by Bill Gammage in his groundbreaking book *The Greatest Estate on Earth*.¹ The reality that the continent of Australia was not a largely untamed wilderness, peopled by roaming bands of itinerant hunter/gatherers moving randomly across the landscape, with little or no sense of ownership, but was a continent of interconnected, carefully managed estates and parks has profound implications for the historical perception of indigenous being, not only in Australia but across the indigenous world.

Its impact questions not only European settler assumptions of indigenous land use, ownership, agriculture, law, society, spirituality and sense of self but also an understanding of the profound and complex sense of spiritual and physical loss and the often-fatal impact of dislocation from country. In other words the idea is that human

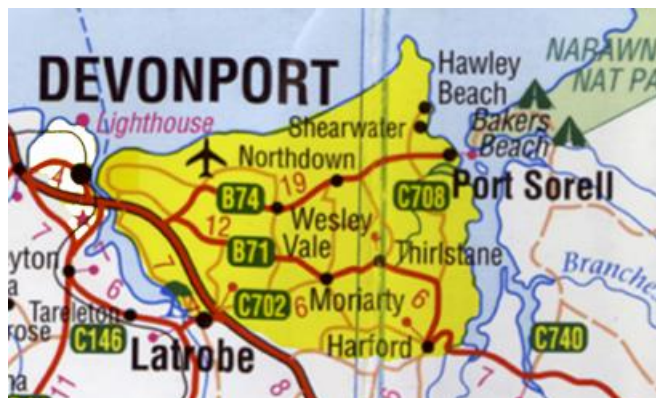
societies can so closely identify with specific areas of country that there is no separation between the existence of that society and all that it holds and the existence of the place that the society dwells upon.

Taking Gammage's thesis I will present a re-imagining of a small area of northwest Tasmania between the Mersey River at Devonport and the Rubicon River at Port Sorrell as a case study of band country and investigating a number of possible ways in which this area can be re-imagined as a single estate and address the profound spiritual loss and ill health of indigenous dislocation that too often still baffles settler society.

On this contemporary map, the area (*in yellow*) is made up of a number of towns and small farming villages and is overlaid with settler roads, electrical grids, sewage and water piping, ownership deeds, political boundaries, fences, communication networks and a range of other authorities, infrastructures and divisions. Francis

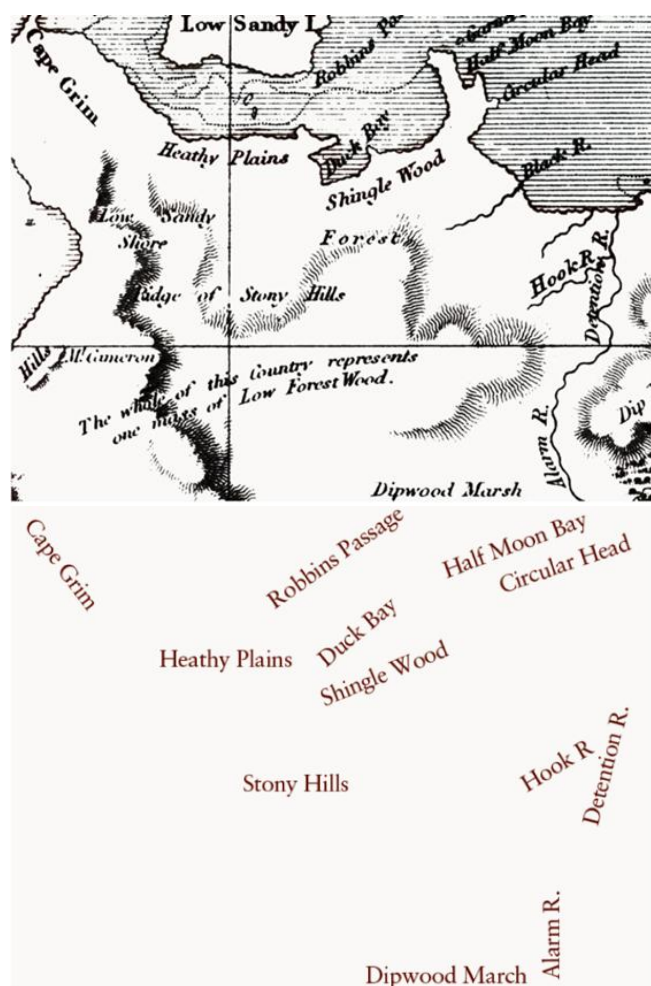
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Pryor captures the subtle complexity of British overlay, ownership and division in his book *The Making of the British Landscape*.² The unheralded completeness of this overlay in all settler lands is captured in the current naming of the landscape.



Like all geographical nomenclature, the original languages of Australia live on in place names, although often not very accurately, but none-the-less insistently. Taking the Tasmanian example places like the town Yolla, meaning the mutton-bird, hark back to an important food source. Ringarooma, Triabunna, and Corinna that refer to original Indigenous place names. Other examples are simply inaccurate, such as the naming of Narawntapu National Park, which according the Tasmanian tourism website 'In 2000, the name of this park was changed from Asbestos Range to "its" Aboriginal title, Narawntapu, in recognition of its long and significant place in the history of Tasmania's Aboriginal people'.³ It is nonsense to suggest that Aboriginal people had vocational national parks although the area obviously had great significance as a meeting and ceremonial area for indigenous people. Narawntapu actually 'refers to one or both of West Head and Badger Head which are prominent coastal features within the Park'.⁴ It is one of the two gateway/meeting areas, along with Latrobe, in my re-imagined area of northwest Tasmania. Another example of romantic re-naming is of the Western or Great Western Tiers as *Kooparoona Niara* meaning 'mountain of the spirits', which in itself is fine, as it returns some language to country, but the

concept of 'spirit and mountain' as geographical description is highly problematical. The Mole Creek and Chudleigh website even suggests that 'the Great Western Tiers were known as Kooparoona Niara, or Mountains of the Spirits, culturally significant as the meeting place of three Aboriginal nations'.⁵ Given the paucity of knowledge concerning the world of the Aboriginal people of Tasmania and the nuances of their language this is a very presumptuous statement to make in public.



Long before the advent of European concepts of ownership and territories this land was part of a language country known as the Northern Tasmanian language speakers.

If re-imagined as a complete entity, this country has natural boundaries, which make sense when the abstract language map below is overlaid onto a topographical map also as shown below. Bound to the east by the Asbestos Hills (Range), which rise through difficult, once heavily forested country full of steep gullies that drop away in the east to the vast Tamar River basin, centre of the Northeastern people, known to history as the Big River, Oyster Bay and the Midlands peoples or as Graeme Calder argues, the Mairremmener people.⁶ To the west the country gives way to the Dial Ranges and the language country of the North West Tasmanians.⁷ To the south the country is bounded by the uplands of the Tasmanian Central plateau.



The boundaries of this country are logical and natural, quite unlike fence lines and settler-imposed boundaries of ownership and authority. So even at the most fundamental level, that of human speech, the role of place and of country, plays an integral part of being. 'I am of this country and my language pertains to and belongs to this country. I am this country'.

Re-imagining a small part of the area of the country of the Northern Tasmanians—the

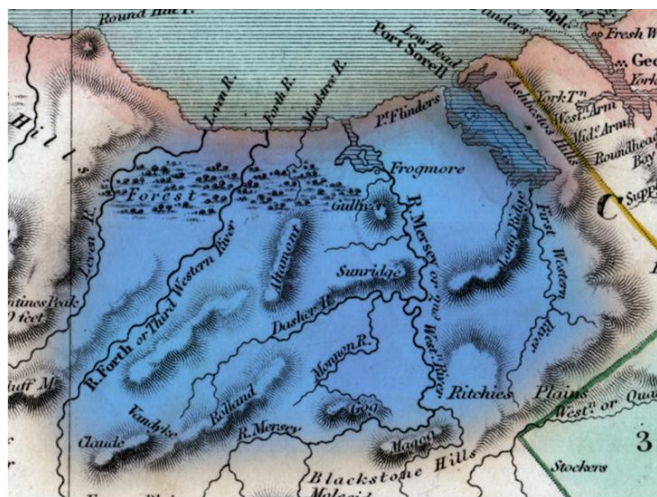
Punnilerpanner⁸—will perhaps show how the land actually gives logical answers to not only the place of languages but to human land use as a whole.

The village of Latrobe sits on the mudflats and flood plains of the Mersey River. A wide and once dangerous wild river, it empties into the Bass Strait, still with a massive tidal discharge. Near its mouth the river is big enough to accommodate commercial shipping but difficult to cross. The river makes a natural boundary for about five kilometers upstream. On its western flank vast mudflats and reed beds are found, home to myriads of birds. When it reaches the present day town of Latrobe the river narrows and splits into a number of tributaries becoming a network of negotiable mudflats and river islands, still supporting a vastly reduced but still healthy bird population. Platypus are still numerous in this very changed environment. Nonetheless, enough of the extensive networks of islands and marshes still exist for one to get a sense of the area as an easy source of food once or twice a year and a natural meeting and crossing point to the west. The rock carvings found at the western mouth of the River Mersey suggests this entire area, including both sides of the river, was a place of significance.

Latrobe is a day's gentle walk from the coast. Robinson reported vast flocks of Swans in the river.⁹ And even more important than the food stocks is the fact that the mudflats are the first convenient crossing point to the west, since the Rubicon River 20 kilometers to the east. The river is a natural estate boundary within a larger language country. Five to eight bands of people could easily have lived within the area bounded by both the Rubicon and Mersey rivers, without ever depleting food sources. More importantly both the Latrobe area and the eastern side of the Rubicon River could have supported meeting grounds for large groups of people for ceremony.¹⁰ The Mersey River mudflats are a natural gate and meeting place to the west and south. The area of Narawntapu National Park on

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the eastern side of the Rubicon River is also the natural terminal point for people moving from the south of Tasmania across the central highlands and down onto the northwest coast.



A second example of re-imagining is not about boundaries but estate management. It re-imagines the eastern riverbank as a naturally formed aqua-garden and place of raw materials. Nearly half way between the mouth of the river and the mudflats and islands up-stream the river takes a dramatic right angle turn, on its headlong rush to the sea. Robinson describes the riverbank as a thick endless forest.¹¹ Today this is suburban Devonport. Before suburbia, when I was young, just to the north of the river's sudden lurch to the north there was once a swamp: a damp, dripping jungle of arrow-straight tea trees, wet river gums, vast wattle trees, cobwebs, large huntsman spiders, snakes, lizards and wildlife such as echidna, possums and wombats. Deep in the swamp it was eerie, dark, pungent, tea-stained and intensely visceral. It enveloped you.

The young tea trees of this swamp were the source material for spear making. So a trip from the mouth of the Mersey River to the mudflats at Latrobe could quite easily be a very slow ambulation for a family. New spears could be made, perhaps for trade. Food was so abundant that little time was required to sustain life. The forest came down to the river's edge so the

journey to the mudflats would probably have taken a single day between spear-making camp to meeting camp. Indeed it would have taken no more than a few hours, even with old people and young children, it was just another short journey through the estate. The idea is that time is relative to the place *and* the all-enveloping environment acts as the church, the supermarket, home and part of the people's being and sense of identity.



Some of the key terms needing to be unpacked in regards to re-imagining Australia are the ideas of *empty land*, *wilderness*, *settler violence and indigenous death and dislocation*, *ceremony and the sacred*, *land ownership*, *agriculture or land use*.

Empty Land

The first idea that has got to be put to rest in the Australian story is that the continent and its islands were somehow or other devoid of human engagement, an empty land, neither owned nor cultivated. Captain Cook, in 1770, used it as a justification for claiming the unknown continent of Australia for the British crown although he had no idea about the size of this vast island, nor who lived here. The idea that settler society found *terra nullius* was a very late nineteenth century legal justification for Aboriginal dispossession,¹² although Governor Bourke's proclamation of 1835¹³ had the legal effect of

stripping Aboriginal people the right to their land.

Terra nullius is a Latin expression deriving from Roman law meaning 'land belonging to no one' or no man's land.¹⁴ An empty land, a land with no people, land as property with no owner. *Terra nullius* is possibly the greatest legal travesty and fabrication ever enacted on an invaded people. A legal travesty first implied in an Australian court of law against the Australian first people in 1827 (*R v Tommy, Monitor*, 28 November 1827).¹⁵ It took 167 years for this lie to be acknowledged and partially overturned. Yet in 2012 few Australians fully understand the implications of this assumption on Australia's ancient Indigenous society since 1778.

This travesty has hidden the truth of the profound ecological/social miracle that was pre-settlement Australia. The truth is only dawning. What largely urban, industrial Europeans stumbled upon was some of the most ancient manipulated, managed, cared for garden/estates in human history. An environment so balanced, so law abiding, so aware, that it has survived longer than any other civilisation. It was, and still is, in parts of Australia today, a land where the original people not only own and identify with a particular estate, they are themselves the estate, the land, the climate, the smells, the animals, the history and ultimately themselves.

Even in the Wik decision of 1996, where the High court of Australia in a 4-3 majority judgement stated, 'that native title and pastoral leases could co-exist over the same area and that native peoples could use land for "hunting and performing sacred ceremonies" even without exercising rights of ownership',¹⁶ does not show any inkling of the loss suffered by exiled Australian first people. Hunting and performing ceremony are far removed and separate from the idea of being of the land. They are external activities not ways of being part of place or country. If Émile Durkheim is right in his analysis of Aboriginal ceremony, then the

participants in ceremony don't simply participate in but actually become ceremony. As Bellah writes, 'Durkheim's point is that the world of ritual is quite different from the one "where his (the participant's) daily life drags wearily along." It is the world of the sacred in contrast to the profane everyday. And, for Durkheim, it is the profound creativity and transformative power of society itself that is the reality apprehended in the ritual'.¹⁷

The idea that the environment of Australia was somehow an untamed wilderness where the original inhabitants stressfully hunted aimlessly for food and enacted ceremony simply for spiritual succor is analogous to a stressed supermarket shopper who goes to a place of worship once a week for spiritual renewal with little conscious connection between the two activities.

In public academic research terms it has only been in the last thirty years or so that the narrative of Australia having been an empty continent, untouched and unchanged by human ingenuity at the time of settlement, has been challenged in any meaningful way. Professor Henry Reynolds began the process in his book *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*. Although the evidence of ancient ownership and work was clear for all to see from initial contact. Baldwin Spencer took photographs of boundary markers in the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ Uninvited settlement requires a certain blindness and often a great deal of moral elasticity. Wherever settlers travelled there were obvious signs of prior ownership even if the owners seemed to have often disappeared. Mind you, explorers, such as the much admired Major Mitchell, were forever shooting people because they objected to others riding on animals across their estates without permission, quite unlike anything they had ever seen. Today the term is 'first contact'.¹⁹

Reynolds was the first post-1967 referendum historian to question seriously the idea that

Australia was an empty land, and that European settlement had simply been a case of heroic pioneers moving onto an empty land, sparsely populated by wandering hunters and gathers, aimlessly traversing the land. The idea that Aboriginal Australia was akin to the African savannah where tribal people either followed uncorralled game to hunt or practiced cattle herding and small-scale plant cultivation (this is not to denigrate African cultural/life), is only now, forty years later, being seriously debunked. Again, the evidence has always been there but it has been largely ignored or not seen for what it is.

Prior to 1967, Aboriginal people remained the hidden and ignored inhabitants of the nation of Australia, being, as they were, excluded from the census. Throughout the later 19th and mid-20th century, they were politically and socially invisible, and due to disease, violence and dislocation were often missing from their ancient lands. This is neither to say that they gave up the fight, that they did not rebel against their dispossession, nor that they kept absolutely silent. They continue to fight to this day for equality of health, appropriate and supported education, native title rights, and a greater say and place in the national estate. It is settler society that has ignored the cries and pleas of the gardeners of this vast estate. Progress and dialogue is occurring, although far too slowly.

The vision of a traditional wandering Aboriginal hunter, standing one-legged, silhouetted against the red dirt hills, leaning on his spears and staring out into an untamed, unknown immensity, is still a powerful vision of Aboriginality in urban non-Aboriginal society. This of course is a blunt cliché. Even the connection between desert and Aboriginality is a distorted understanding. First people lived in a diverse continent of wildly varying weather types and managed the estate as appropriate to the local climate.²⁰ However, to show the connectivity of this enormous patchwork of estates it could be surmised that the Tasmanian Aboriginal proclivity for red ochre was a cultural

memory from the original ice aged migrants to the island from the deep red centre of Australia.

Tragically, often hidden from white Australia, the endless ambulation of estate management, aqua farming, gardening, learning, celebrating and worshipping has become an all-too-often ritual of grief, as people move constantly to attend the funerals of their people.

Wilderness

Wilderness or wild land is a natural environment on Earth that essentially has not been disturbed by humans. It may also be defined as 'the most intact, undisturbed wild natural areas left on our planet—those last truly wild places that humans do not control and have not developed with roads, pipelines or other industrial infrastructure'.²¹ However this generally agreed definition concerning the impact of man on a landscape poorly represents the situation in Australia where indigenous society lived-in, shaped, worshipped and were part of all environments in Australia for millennia. To exclude their presence and deny their impact in a definition of non-urban, non-agricultural place denies the profound impact of Indigenous life on the Australian continent.²²

England, towards the end of the 18th century, was a country undergoing profound social, economic and industrial change. Enclosure and the laws that allowed the wholesale appropriation of open or common land to be legally owned by the wealthy was at its most pervasive between the mid-18th and early 19th centuries. As the first settlers arrived in Australia the general mindset of the ambitious, the wealthy and the educated was the legal appropriation of land as experienced back home in England. Except, the appropriation was not from a rural agricultural working class with ancient traditions, rights and clearly understood duties and taxes, but an unknown, apparently unsophisticated people who spoke a multitude of languages with unknown ancient laws, rights, methodologies, land use and

traditions that had developed long before the Pharos ruled ancient Egypt. They had stumbled onto what Bill Gammage terms the 'Greatest Estate on Earth'.

Land in England equated to wealth, power and prestige. The entire system of the British aristocracy was based on power linked to land ownership. In the 18th and 19th centuries, political power was brought to bear on the act of enclosure and therefore legally sanctioned appropriated land ownership. What the settlers brought with them from the old country was a legal system geared towards legalising the appropriation of land. In other words 'you enclose the land. You own the land'. Surveys, maps, fences, government offices of deeds and titles, government land inspectors etc. were just some of the tools that have allowed the 'legal' creation of land ownership in Australia.

The first people already had complex legal systems. They were after all, owners of large estates. An extraordinary natural infrastructure had been developed across the continent. In Tasmania there were grazing pastures for kangaroo; footpaths traversing towering old growth forests, mountain passes crisscrossing the island. There were places of managed plenty along the coast that could sustain many people for short periods of time. Natural cupboards held their tools and weapons throughout the estate. Fire was used across Australia to control natural growth. Even in the 1830s, Robinson witnessed traditional harvesting with his own eyes. But he saw this just before full traditional estate management was wiped out with only a bare handful of survivors. The gardens had lost their gardeners.²³

Australia was not England. What the settlers found was not a land designed for domesticated animals, fenced areas of traditional European monoculture and pasture grazing or even manageable farm sizes. What they found was often vast land ownership more closely identified with large Scottish estates without the feudal

underpinning. What the settlers neither saw nor were able to see was that Australia was a continent wide system of managed gardens, parks, forests and estates, the foundation argument of Gammage's work.

Even the flora and fauna of the Australian continent, including Tasmania, was almost unimaginably different and strange. Kangaroos, the most numerous of the grazing stock in Australia, do not take kindly to the idea of fencing or herding in a European sense. They graze quite unlike cattle or sheep, or even goats. The Australian first people created kangaroo runs where traditional estate managers never needed to walk far to find food. Tall trees were left unburnt for possums to flourish in. These trees often had steps chipped into them to ease the harvest. Much of the flora of Australia needs fire to thrive, not mowing.²⁴

Most confusing of all to the Europeans, the first people seemed to have no boundary markers, or identifiable means or knowledge of influencing or changing the land. In other words, in terms of cultivating the land other than with fire and a seemingly constant need to keep moving as nomads from place to place, European settlers did not see estate management. They only saw constant and apparently aimless movement, although many Aboriginal peoples, such as the eel farming Gunditjmarra people of Western Victoria, lived quite sedentary lives. What Europeans perceived, as they moved ever outwards across the land, was 'wilderness', unclaimed, often uninhabited, unfenced wilderness, and in many parts of the continent a seemingly empty wilderness.

Gammage has finally and succinctly put to rest the wildly inaccurate view of pre-settlement Australia. He shows, with overwhelming evidence, the manipulation of the land by the first people. What is most interesting is that he finds much of his evidence from the recorded landscape observations of early settlers and landscape artists who recorded what they saw before it was

changed by settlement, but did not understand what they were recording.

Gammage argues that the Australian landscape was overwhelmingly modified for the benefits of its human inhabitants. What the settlers actually stumbled into was a vast network of ancient gardens and estates. Aboriginal societies were not in anyway similar to wandering African livestock herders and hunters or Native American plains hunters of the buffalo, but were far more akin to estate managers, gamekeepers, wild gardeners, ancient horticulturalists and aqua-farmers. In his introduction Gammage writes something of profound implication; 'collectively they (Aborigines) managed an Australian estate they thought of as single and universal'.

Because his evidence is so succinct and well documented, an entire rethinking Australian land use is required, not only within white Australian society but also across Aboriginal Australia, as so much understanding and lore has been lost in both parts of Australian society and such damage has been done in destroying this truly ancient estate. Our continuing ignorance and damaging practices are adversely impacting on us all.

Settler Violence and Indigenous Death and Dislocation

The evidence that pre-settlement Australia was an unmodified wilderness proves the idea to be entirely bogus. This is not to say that pre-settlement Australia didn't have wild places; it most certainly did. But as a continent, at the time of settlement, it was not a wild place; it was a carefully imagined, carefully managed and manipulated place. It was also not empty or empty in the sense that settlers meant empty. This asks the question, why was so much of early settler Australia thought of as being empty, devoid of human life?

This is a highly contested and emotional point of departure within Aboriginal/settler discourse and the root cause of the unpleasant history wars which began in 2002 after the publication of Keith Windshuttle's highly contentious book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One: Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847*. My expertise is in colonial Van Diemen's Land with specific knowledge of the destruction of traditional first people society during the 1820s and 30s. However, I believe the events in Van Diemen's Land are indicative of events across continental Australia.

The main argument and point of disagreement concerning emptiness has been at the level of fatal violence perpetrated on the first people of Australia since settlement. There is no longer a valued argument that this violence was not prolonged, often fatal, cruel, unnecessary and despicable. The fact that so many people lost their lives as a direct result of violence is a national tragedy.

But I believe the loud and vicious argument over fatality numbers caused by violence hides a far more insidious, less recognised reason for the long held settler perception that much of Australia was an empty land devoid of human habitation or manipulation. Naturally, Australia, being a vast continent, was sparsely populated but not empty and many parts of pre-settlement Australia could sustain substantial populations. The Sydney basin, the Murray Darling region, many parts of Queensland, south west Western Australia and many parts of Tasmania are a few examples. The Sydney basin alone is estimated to have support between 5 to 8,000 people.

The far biggest killer of Aboriginal people, particularly in the years immediately after first contact with Europeans, was disease. It only took one explorer with a common cold or un-presented infectious disease to cause a minor unseen pandemic in a traditional population. Disease is always mentioned in discussions on this subject

but is too often fore-fronted by questions concerning the violence.

In the Sydney basin between 1789 and 1790 nearly the entire first people population died during a smallpox pandemic. As the years went by sexually transmitted diseases began to affect fertility rates across Australia and a delicate population balance was soon obliterated.

Professor Janet McCalman notes that Australia had been caught in a pincer movement between smallpox, which had been moving south-east through the Indonesia archipelago until it was brought to northern Australia by Macassan trepang fishermen, and the other old-world diseases that were being steadily introduced by European settlement. Smallpox immediately preceded the European settlement of Victoria, depopulating the densest Aboriginal communities along the Murray and through the Western District. Even earlier, whalers and sealers had introduced sexually transmitted diseases, most seriously for indigenous women and their fertility, gonorrhea and chlamydia.²⁵

In the case of Van Diemen's Land, a place where genocide has been mooted, only some hundred and sixty deaths have actually been recorded although many more people were most likely killed outside of official notice. Henry Reynolds quotes Lyndall Ryan's number of perhaps 200 violent deaths as being more accurate.²⁶ Professor Ryan has continued to reassess this number, believing that the violence was much more widespread and fatal than presently recognised. Even so, double or even triple that number of people out of a likely population of 3,500 to 4,500 people still leaves roughly 2,000+ to 3,000+ people unaccounted for. These numbers are educated speculation and are vigorously disputed by some.

Across the rest of Australia, violent deaths were too often the norm in black/white encounters, firstly as Aborigines attacked early explorers and settlers and then as a sustained official and semi-

official practice particularly in the settlement of rural Queensland and Western Australia. Yet these deaths do not explain the widely perceived human emptiness of much of Australia.

War and violence are obvious reasons for death to see. There are clearly defined perpetrators and victims, but silent killer diseases are much more problematical. Who is to blame? Who was responsible? Who brought smallpox to Sydney? Was it contrived, an accident, or did it come from somewhere other than the European settlers? This is not to suggest that settlers were not responsible for bringing a host of deadly diseases with them. McCalman hints at a possible reason for the emptiness when she writes, 'Smallpox immediately preceded the European settlement of Victoria'.²⁷

Another good example of this emptiness comes from the journals of George Augustus Robinson.²⁸ On many occasions during his seven trips around Van Diemen's Land he tracked across empty country filled with forlorn and deserted traditional huts, particularly along the north west coast of the island, an area hardly settled by Europeans, yet in this area, he met not a single functioning family of Tasmanian Aboriginal people except once, when he fleetingly heard traditional people at Port Sorell. The first people travelling with him, particularly in the north east, often expressed surprise that the land was so empty. They constantly expected to find people across the very next hill. On one occasion Robinson was tracking what he thought was a substantial war band, who had been attacking and terrifying the early settlers of the north east. What he found were five young warriors and a grandmother, after weeks of tracking.

It is the settlement time lines in Van Diemen's Land that are problematical. Just before settlement and up until the early 1820s a small number of lawless sealers and whalers impacted on the first people of the north east, plying their trade in the sealing grounds of the Bass Strait islands and across the north-west coast. Settlers

had moved both north and south into the central midlands of the island. Although small in number, they certainly had a grave impact on the Aboriginal people, bringing sexual disease, pneumonia, disruption and violence to the people living along the coasts and through the central midlands. However, few permanent settlers moved onto the north west and west coasts until much later in the 19th century. Yet by the early 1830's almost the entire north east, north, west and north west coasts of Van Diemen's Land were empty of original inhabitants. Certainly violence occurred but not pernicious enough, or widespread enough to have caused the complete collapse of the Indigenous population.

Even in the rest of Tasmania there is fairly consistent consensus amongst experts that the main impact from settlement was after 1824-25. Sometime in the ten years after this time something happened, outside of the veil of European settlement. Only around 300 people survived into the 1830s. On evidence, pneumonia pandemics seem the most probable killer. Robinson witnessed one in 1829 on Bruny Island and again at Macquarie Harbor on the West Coast in 1833.

This graphic displays two bands of 27 traditional people Robinson removed from the bush to Macquarie Harbour in 1833 and shows the virulent impact of European diseases on traditional people. A frightening indication of what may well of happened across Australia.

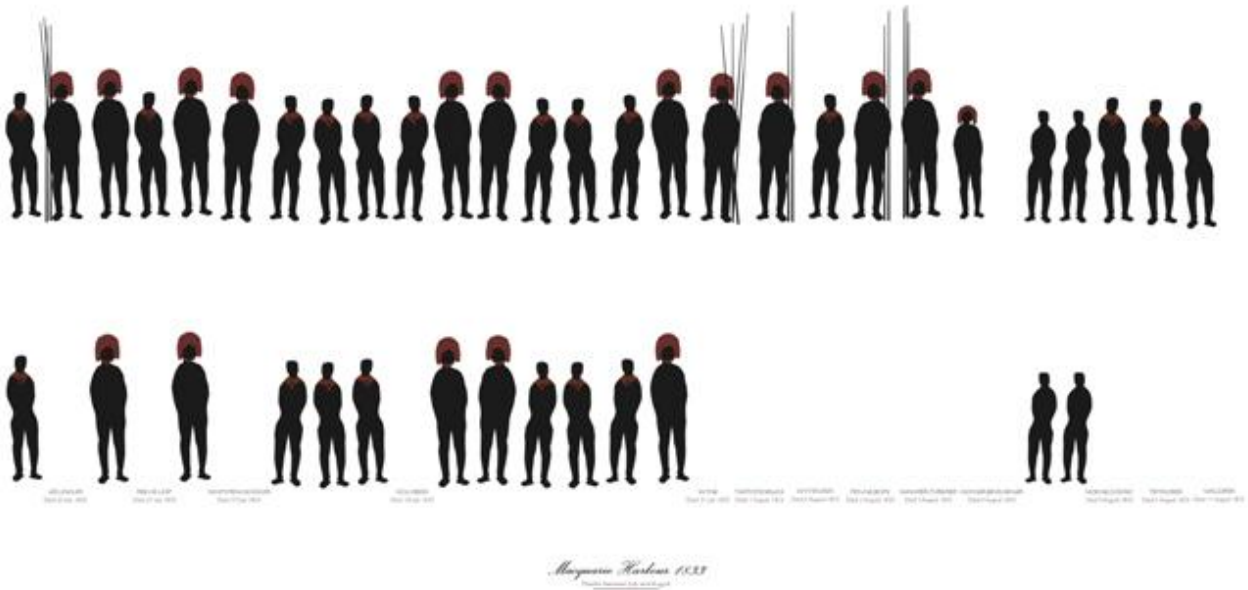
Within two weeks of capture and exile nearly 50% of these people lie dead from pneumonia.

European settlement often took place in a largely empty land or at least a land left unattended. The most likely reasons being a combination of disease destroying the dynamic and sustainability of original societies and later, fatal violent dislocation and state sanctioned removal by force of the survivors.

Australia was not a wilderness. It was a carefully managed land of truly ancient care and attention to cultivation. It was also not empty; it was a sustainable productive environment of ancient controlled human habitation and wealth, just not wealth that Europeans could possibly understand when first confronted by it.

Ceremony and the Sacred

Unfortunately this estate has largely been damaged and/or destroyed through ignorance, neglect, misunderstanding and the often disease ridden and violent dispossession of its custodians. The natural knowledge of millennia has often been lost, sometimes almost overnight. Aboriginal anger is not simply the anger of a people defeated by war. Defeated nations and victims of war can recover and slowly regain their loss, but the hurt, anger and pain of gardeners and estate managers who see the work of their ancestors destroyed and their worlds taken from them, losing their whole being. This is a place much more difficult to return from.



Because Australia was settled at the beginning of the second industrial revolution, by predominantly urban people, the understanding of spiritual belief and religious practice they brought with them had largely become divorced from the spirituality derived from the natural world. The connection between religious practice and practical doing and making had become removed from each other. When religious bound ritual is divorced from practical application its rituals and actions become abstract and symbolically disengaged. Humanity has always worshipped in the garden of the estate. The garden sits at the heart of paradise.²⁹

Spirituality and non-textual religious belief derived from living within an external environment becomes a daily, seamless action of practical doing, believing and ritual; the ritual of learning the crafts of making and manipulation of place; the creation and communication of culture; the spirituality and story of life.

The singing of song before collecting or killing a food source or embarking on a journey or the rituals of the maturing journey through life becomes daily law, existence, practicality and

action. In the constant management of a vast estate that provides sustenance, understanding, meaning and life to a people is all embracing. To enact ceremony before action gives meaning to the action. If the world of dreams, life, understanding, thought and society are wrapped up in the womb of place, then place becomes life quite unlike being from an urban compartmentalized place. Take the place away then what is left? It is not like leaving a place, it is more akin to losing not only an entire world but part of oneself. If a forest is cut down it is not only the trees that disappear; the whole forest world disappears. If a language dies then a whole way of creating and perceiving a world dies. If a people are removed from their country then that country dies and the people too often die with it.

Because Europeans have not understood the depth of the nature of the indigenous estate/garden world that was pre-settlement Australia, they have not understood the depth of loss to Aboriginal people. It is not just the removal from place or even the loss of ownership of place. It is the terrible damage and destruction of a spiritual world directly derived from a lost garden.

The pre-settlement world of Australian first people was not a world full of random spirits. It was the endless knowledge of a continent. It was not a world of nomadic hunter/gatherers moving across a landscape, roaming endlessly after herds of animals and aimlessly picking flora where found. It was an intended, manufactured environment, carefully tended in an endless multitude of parks, estates, gardens and sacred places, where everything had meaning, knowledge and purpose and where the health of the land required endlessly adherence to laws and repeated rituals, crafts and intelligence.

By the time humanity reached the end of its journey across the planet and south, through the unique lands of Australia and onto Trowunna (Tasmania), the wild, mountainous, wet, windy, green and sometimes cold southern tip of the Australian landmass, the adaption of Australia's unique environment, in all its myriad states, had been bent to human intelligence and knowledge, built over 60,000 years of observation, cultivation, worship and experience.

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Notes

- ¹Gammage, B., *The Greatest Estate on Earth*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011
- ²Pryor, F., *The Making of the British Landscape*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 2010
- ³http://www.discovertasmania.com/activities_and_attractions/wilderness_areas/national_parks_and_reserves/narawntapu_national_park (retrieved 13-5-2012)
- ⁴<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=6767> p.2 (retrieved 13-5-2012)
- ⁵http://www.molecreek.info/alum_cliffs_mole_creek.htm (retrieved 13-5-2012)
- ⁶Calder, G. *Levée, Line and Martial Law*, p. 17
- ⁷McFarlane, I. *Beyond Awakening*, p. 220
- ⁸McFarlane, I. *Beyond Awakening*, p. 220
- ⁹Robinson p. 212
- ¹⁰The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service in their 2000 management plan suggests as much concerning the area east of the Rubicon. <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=6767> p. 17
- ¹¹ibid, p. 212
- ¹²McFarlane, p. xi
- ¹³<http://foundingdocs.gov.au/item-sdid-75.html> (sighted 9 May 2012)
- ¹⁴[http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/publications.nsf/0/da2f5f5ed50f5d38ca256ecf000948cd/\\$FILE/15-98.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/publications.nsf/0/da2f5f5ed50f5d38ca256ecf000948cd/$FILE/15-98.pdf) (sighted 9 May 2012)
- ¹⁵<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/NSWSupC/1827/70.html> (sighted 9 May 2012)
- ¹⁶<http://www.atns.net.au/agreement.asp?EntityID=701> (sighted 31 May 2012)
- ¹⁷Bellah RN. *Religion in Human Evolution*, p. 18
- ¹⁸Spencer, B. *Wandering in Wild Australia*, fig. 3, p. 31
- ¹⁹Mitchell's published journey journals, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, can be read on-line at <http://freeread.com.au/ebooks/e00036.html>
- ²⁰It is obvious that desert people such as the Arunta looked after a very different estate than the coastal Neone people of Bruny Island. Spencer. B., vol 1 ch. 7. Plomley, N.J.B. Chapter 1 The Bruny Island Expedition. Gammage also looks at this diversity as does Clarke
- ²¹www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wilderness. Ideas of wildness and the definition of wilderness have raged over the past two centuries and falls into two basic forms. Finding workable legal definitions as a basis for setting aside and controlling land use, (http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/wa1987139/s2.html#wilderness_area) and the ever increasing realisation of humanity that wild places are disappearing faster than we can fully understand them. Writers poets, artists, activists, philosophers are all becoming concerned at the loss of the places that encapsulate the idea

of wilderness. These writers include John Muir, EO Wilson and Wade Davis as well as scientists and activists such as Tim Flannery and David Attenborough.

²² <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/publications/commission/books/pubs/nourishing-terrains.pdf>

²³ The reports of witnessed traditional life in Tasmania can be found throughout GA Robinson's journals, in the three books of Bonwick, in the collected accounts in Ling Roth amongst other contemporary reports, writings and accounts of earl Van Diemen's Land.

²⁴ Early sea-born explorers, including Cook, reported the constant sighting of smoke and fire when visiting the coasts of Australia. Many early commentators observed the capacity of traditional people to use fire with precision and knowledge, Gammage spends an entire chapter discussing the use of fire. (Gammage, chapter 6). Ling Roth also has a chapter of collecting observations concerning fire. (Ling Roth Chapter 5). See also <http://asgap.org.au/APOL3/sep96-1.html> (Sighted 1 June 2012)

²⁵ <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00473b.htm> (sighted 1 June 2012)

²⁶ Reynolds, H., *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, Penguin NZ. Auckland, 1995. p. 121

²⁷ <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00473b.htm> (sighted 1 June 2012)

²⁸ ed. Plomley, *Friendly Missions*, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1966.

²⁹ There has been done much research on this subject from Frazer to Graves The most recent being Bellah.